

Anti-Semitism in Greece: Recent Developments
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Much of the information contained in this report, in addition to further examples can be found in the Greek Helsinki Monitor/Minority Rights Group Greece November 2002 report, *Anti-Semitism in Greece a Current Picture: 2001-2002*, available on the internet¹

Anti-Semitic expressions in Greece continue to stem from two central misconceptions: a perceived threat to the traditional, Orthodox Greek culture and the direct link between Greek Jewry and Israeli policy in the Middle East. In the absence of strong criticism, selected clergy, journalists, and politicians have brought their extreme views into mainstream discussion, the effect of which seeds anti-Semitic views within the larger Greek population.

Manifestation of anti-Semitism in Reporting and Commentary on the Middle East Crisis

Anti-Israeli sentiment regarding the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict and perceived threats to the Greek Orthodox Christian culture, continue to fuel the majority of anti-Semitic comments and incidents reported in the Greek media. Anti-Semitism in Greece is often downplayed by skeptics as protest against Israel or as the comments of a few, radical individuals in defense of what they see as a threatened Greek culture. To the contrary, the pervasiveness of misidentification, anti-Semitic political cartoons, and libel, are symptomatic of the acceptance or indifference to anti-Semitic sentiments by sections of the Greek populace and continue to adversely affect the country's Jewish community.

From a historical standpoint, Greece has traditionally lent vocal support to the Palestinians in their conflict with Israel. Intense criticism of Israel and the Sharon government therefore comes with little surprise in light of increased violence in the region. However, while freedom of speech is an inalienable right, the blurring of anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish reporting has increased the quantity of anti-Semitic content in the Greek media. References to fascism, the Holocaust, and Hitler that have been used to describe current Israeli policies constitute anti-Semitic comments and cannot be defended as mere criticism of the Israeli state. Such descriptions desensitize the horrors endured by thousands of Greek Jews during World War II and connect the independent actions of the Israeli government directly to the country's Jewish population.

¹ Greek Helsinki Monitor/Minority Rights Group – Greece. *Anti-Semitism in Greece a Current Picture: 2001-2002*. November 2002, http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/organizations/ghm_mrgg_antisemitism_2002.rtf

Anti-Semitic critique has also taken the form of political cartoons printed in mainstream, daily Greek newspapers. Again, anti-Semitism is manifested in Holocaust debasement, depicting Jewish Israelis as modern day Nazis. Among the worst examples were two illustrations appearing in *Eleftherotypia*, Greece's largest newspaper, on 1 April 2002 and 14 April 2002. The first cartoon, occupying half of the *Eleftherotypia*'s front page under the title 'Holocaust II,' shows an Israeli soldier in a German World War II uniform, labeled with the Star of David on his helmet, pointing his rifle at a smaller Palestinian dressed in striped, concentration camp prisoner's clothing. A yellow star is attached to the prisoner's chest.² A second cartoon, printed 14 April 2002 in the same newspaper depicts an Israeli soldier, identified by the Star of David on his helmet, but also marked with a swastika on his chest, standing over the dead bodies of Heteocles and Polynikis, heroes from Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*. The caption reads, "Not only do we kill them, but we decide who, when, where, and why we bury them or not!"³ Heteocles and Polynikis are revered in ancient Greek tragedy as two brothers who killed each other in battle and were denied burial. Their presence in the illustration embellishes a perceived threat to Greek society, striking at the country's cultural core. As Greek author Eva Omiroli wrote in a letter to *Eleftherotypia*, "Tabloid headlines and sensationalist images are in no way conducive to providing information. Rather, they constitute time-bombs of prejudice, discrimination, fanaticism, and inevitable racism."⁴

Media Libel: Dissemination of Rumor

Media libel, including rumors of 'Jewish' involvement and prior knowledge of the September 11th attacks and claims that Israelis have trafficked and experimented with organs of dead Palestinians, encourages the spread of Jewish conspiracy theories amongst the Greek population and promulgates underlying anti-Semitic sentiment. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, several Greek newspapers published reports that up to 4,000 Jews had not reported to work the morning of the attacks after receiving an advance warning that terrorists would fly planes into each of the World Trade Center towers. Alarming, this unsubstantiated claim was met with widespread public acceptance, in which a poll by state television NET on 17-18 October 2001 showed 42% of those surveyed subscribed to the rumor.⁵ September 11th libel also compelled outspoken, right-wing parliamentarian George Karatzaferis to table a request to Foreign Minister George Papandreou, asking him to address the issue and whether he had brought these claims to the attention of his European counterparts.

Similar accusations were also printed in columns in two consecutive issues of *Informational Bulletin*, a weekly magazine mailed to all members of the Technical Chamber of Greece (TEE), a professional organization representing 80,000 engineers and business people. Both the

² KYR, *Eleftherotypia*, Monday, 1 April 2002. Page 1, http://www.enet.gr/online/online_p1.jsp?dt=01/04/2002

³ Stathis, *Eleftherotypia*. Monday, 15 April 2002. Page 6, http://www.enet.gr/online/online_p1_fpage_text.jsp?dt=15/04/2002&id=29123764

⁴ Eva Omiroli: "On 'Holocaust II,'" letter to the editor, *Eleftherotypia*, 3 April 2002. Page 6, http://www.enet.gr/online/online_p1_text.jsp?dt=03/04/2002&c=110&id=70589460

⁵ Conducted by KAPA Research among 622 households in greater Athens area for the program "Protagonistes," aired 18 October 2001 on NET (National Hellenic Television)

aforementioned press coverage and the TEE publication prompted official statements of protest from the Israeli Embassy addressing the rumors initially as “simply preposterous”⁶ and later, in response to columns appearing in the *Informational Bulletin*, called attention to the “malicious mixture of prejudice, racism, and anti-Semitism supposedly expressed in the framework of a free exchange of ‘views.’”⁷

The following April, Greece’s two largest daily newspapers, *Eleftherotypia* and *Ta Nea*, published articles, which uncritically cited a translated document obtained by the state Athens News Agency (Athinaiko Praktoreio Eideision) from the Greek Union of Palestinian Doctors and Pharmacists. The articles claimed Israeli Defense Forces were involved in the harvest and sale of human organs of dead Palestinians. A third major Greek daily, *Apogevmatini*, ran the headline on 2.4.2002: “They’ve surpassed Nazi atrocity: They’re selling organs of dead Palestinians.”⁸ A picture printed adjacent to the headline shows a pair of feet standing on banner equating the Star of David to a swastika. These accusations were met with expected denouncement from the Israeli Embassy, however it is impossible to ignore the social impact of slander prominently displayed in news kiosks that encourages stereotypes and misconceptions. Such claims draw connections with the ‘blood libel’ spread through Europe in the 19th century and irresponsibly contribute to public misconceptions.

In other cases, letters printed in the Greek press have violated the country’s anti-racist Law 927(1979) as amended with Law 1419(1984).⁹ In particular, *Eleftherotypia* published a letter on 15 April 2002 containing strong anti-Semitic remarks. Among similar comments, the writer charges, “The Jews ...aren’t human beings... They infiltrate societies, first playing the poor souls to generate pity and, when the time comes, they’ll grab you by the throat.”¹⁰ Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) immediately sent a letter to *Eleftherotypia*, asking the paper to issue an apology for printing blatant anti-Semitic material. The request was ignored and GHM followed by pressing charges against the newspaper. Athens Prosecutor Georgios Gerakis indicted *Eleftherotypia* for violation of articles 1 and 2 of the anti-racist law, prohibiting racial discrimination or hatred and prohibiting public expressions through the press of ideas offensive to persons due to their origin. A trial date is set for 26 September 2003. *Ta Nea* has also been indicted in response to similar charges filed by GHM after a slightly different version of the same letter appeared in its pages on 16 April 2002.

During the same period, well-known Greek journalist Dimos Mavrommatis wrote an article for the newspaper *Apogevmatini* titled “Letter to the Jews.” Unusual in the fact that it was reprinted two days later on 19 March 2002 by *Eleftherotypia*, the article chastises the “silence of the Jews, the Greek Jews in particular” in the face of “the Hitlerist Sharon who, with his alliances with the neo-Fascist phalanges, has created a Mauthausen, if not an Auschwitz or a Dachau in 10 days and a

⁶ Embassy of Israel Press Release, 24 September 2001

⁷ Embassy of Israel Press Release, 23 October 2001; and Letter to the President of TEE, 22 October 2001

⁸ Available at <http://www.in.gr/innews/kiosk/nkiosk.asp?ord=6&date=2/4/2002&nid=7>

⁹ Laws 927/1979 and 1419/1984 specifically state that:

“Whoever intentionally and publicly instigates, either orally or in the press or through written texts and illustrations or through any other means, acts or activities capable of provoking discrimination, hatred or violence against persons or a group of persons, solely because of their racial, religious or national origin, may be punished with imprisonment of up to two years or a fine or both.”

¹⁰ Letter to the editor signed by Konstantinos Papandreou, Fares-Patras: “About Jews”, *Eleftherotypia*, 15 April 2002, also available at http://www.enet.gr/online/online_pl_text.jsp?c=112&id=21903572.

genocide that scared even the American butchers.”¹¹ Mavrommatis’ article garnered praise for what was widely seen as its courageous tone. To the contrary, the article was an open attack on Jews and as Mavrommatis wrote, Greek Jews in particular. Both the Kentriko Israilitiko Symvoulío (Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, KIS) and the Israeli Embassy issued statements calling attention to the anti-Semitic tone of Mavrommatis’ letter, yet much of their argument was lost when news of the journalist’s death surfaced. As result, most criticism of Dimos Mavrommatis’ “Letter to the Jews” was lost in a flurry of public tribute to the late writer.

Political and public anti-Semitism: Personal Positions

The 13 October 2002 election for the Greater Athens “super-prefect” was marked with an alarming development as ultra-nationalist George Karatzaferis secured 14% of the vote in the third best showing of the election. His success has silenced those who dismissed Karatzaferis as a fringe extremist and confirms that Greece now has a xenophobic, populist political party similar to those of other western European nations.¹² Karatzaferis is also owner of the private television channel TeleAsty and weekly newspaper Alpha Ena, both of which are regular sources of anti-Semitic and nationalist propaganda.

Anti-Semitism in the political spectrum has also followed similar media trends, in that criticism of Israel often results in unwarranted criticism of Greek Jews. In March 2002 during the Jewish holiday of Passover, former Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos led a demonstration in front of the Israeli Embassy to protest military operations in Palestinian territory and deliver a similar petition. Due to the holiday, no Israeli officials were in their offices to accept the petition or to respond to Pangalos’ comments, touching off a series of sharp accusations and Israeli rebuttals. Two weeks later, on 14 April 2002, Pangalos authored an article for Greece’s largest Sunday newspaper *To Vima on Sunday*, in which he criticized what he saw as the Greek Jewish community’s “glaring absence from all the demonstrations against the massacre of the Palestinians,”¹³ again drawing unwarranted criticism on the minority population.

In early April 2002, the same day allegations of Israeli organ trafficking were published, three major daily newspapers, *Eleftherotypia*¹⁴, *Ta Nea*¹⁵, and *To Vima*¹⁶, carried an article written by accomplished composer and Nobel Peace Prize candidate Mikis Theodorakis. The article was a further appropriation of Holocaust language used to criticize the state of Israel and accused “the Jews” of “imitating Nazi barbarity,” of becoming “more and more enamored with Nazi methods,” and of carrying out “the final solution against the Palestinians.”

On 10 and 14 April 2002 Mikis Theodorakis served as the keynote speaker at a pro-Palestinian rally in Athens and Thessaloniki and opened his speeches with references to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as “a little Hitler.” The first demonstration was broadcast live by major television network Alpha TV. The day after the protest in Thessaloniki, in which the Star of David was displayed in the form of a swastika, vandals defaced the city’s Holocaust Monument and desecrated several graves in Ioannina’s Jewish cemetery.

¹¹ Dimos Mavrommatis: “A letter to the Jews”, *Apogevmatini*, 17 March 2002; also Yannis Triantis: “The guilty silence (and the Inaction)...”, *Eleftherotypia*, 19 March 2002, also available, abridged, at http://www.enet.gr/online/online_pl_text.jsp?dt=19/03/2002&c=112&id=2640036

¹² *Economist Intelligence Unit*. “Greece politics – Mixed messages from local elections,” 15 October 2002

¹³ Theodoros Pangalos: “Tragedy, Confusion and Deplorable Incidents,” *To Vima* Sunday, 14 April 2002, Page A12

¹⁴ Under “Holocaust IP” logo, “Mikis Theodorakis: Where are the people?” *Eleftherotypia*, 2 April 2002, Page 14.

¹⁵ Mikis Theodorakis “The Jews are imitating the crimes of the Nazis: The former victims are enchanted with the methods of their former victims”, *Ta Nea*, 2 April 2002, Page 45.

¹⁶ Mikis Theodorakis “The Israelis will someday regret”, *To Vima*, 2 April 2002, pp. 1, 5.

Anti-Semitic Incidents

Increased violence in the Middle East contributed largely to a spate of anti-Semitic incidents of vandalism in the spring of 2002. Much of the vandalism consisted of attacks on Jewish monuments and cemeteries in the northern cities of Thessaloniki and Ioannina as well as the island of Rhodes. Alarming, the gravity of such attacks is often downplayed when compared with more violent incidents in other western European countries, resulting in limited publicity and weak condemnation of the actions. Furthermore, attacks on Jewish interests are seen as protests against Israel and are dismissed as reactionary, regardless of the basic anti-Semitic nature of each incident. It should be further noted that unlike those of other minority worship groups, guards must provide 24-hour security for the Jewish community's synagogues, cemeteries, monuments, and social clubs. Jewish property left unguarded is subject to vandalism.

On 15 April 2002, a day after the city's Holocaust Memorial service and a separate large pro-Palestinian demonstration, vandals dripped red paint on and around the Holocaust Monument of Thessaloniki and painted the word "Palestinians" on the surrounding marble pavement. While the KIS issued a letter expressing its deep regret of the incident, *Eleftherotypia* reported that the vandals had left "a red protest, symbolic of blood, over the extermination of Palestinians by the Israeli troops."¹⁷ Of further and more recent relevance, the Holocaust Monument of Thessaloniki was subject to a second major anti-Semitic attack on 3 February 2003, when vandals spray painted two swastikas on the memorial.

The same night as the 15 April 2002 incident, at least three gravestones and other gravesites were desecrated in Ioannina's Jewish cemetery. Similar to the Thessaloniki attack, the vandalism in Ioannina was linked to protest against Israeli policy, but details surrounding the incident raised further questions. On 22 April 2001, a front-page article in the local newspaper *Erevna* reported that four Ioannina police officers had participated in the attack on the gravesites.¹⁸ Moisis Elisaf, president of the city's Jewish community and professor of internal medicine at Ioannina University, filed an official request with the prosecutor's office to look into the paper's allegations. However, results of the investigation were not reported.

In a separate incident on 23 June 2002, the small Jewish community of Rhodes inaugurated a memorial to the island's 1,600 Holocaust victims. Ten days after the opening ceremony, on the morning of 4 July 2002, the monument was found severely damaged by what local newspaper *Proodos* called an act of "unprecedented vandalism."¹⁹ Vandals had scraped inscriptions off of the monument and torn wires from the installation. Carmen Cohen, spokeswoman for the Jewish Community of Rhodes, had conveyed concerns about the monument in a conversation with GHM on 12 June 2002. Commenting on the atmosphere surrounding construction of the memorial, she reported that individuals from the local community had harassed workmen with comments such as, "Get out Jews," "You'll turn us all into Jews," and "You'll bring Sharon here."²⁰

Archbishop Christodoulos and anti-Semitism within the Greek Orthodox community

In accordance with EU data protection standards, the Greek government voted in the spring of 2000 to remove reference to religion from the national identity card. Among its opponents, was

¹⁷ "Red paint on the Holocaust Monument", *Eleftherotypia*, 17 April 2002, also available at http://www.enet.gr/online/online_p1_text.jsp?c=111&id=28665284.

¹⁸ "What were they doing in the Jewish cemetery the night of the desecration?" *Erevna*, 22 April 2002.

¹⁹ "Monument to Jews in Rhodes Damaged: Unprecedented Vandalism," *Proodos*, 4 July 2002.

²⁰ Telephone conversation, 12 June 2002.

the Greek Orthodox Church, which, under the leadership of the outspoken Archbishop Christodoulos, conducted an aggressive signature collection campaign in attempt to block any reform of the ID card. Archbishop Christodoulos led protest rallies drawing thousands from Athens and Thessaloniki, who were present to hear the Archbishop's insinuations of a "Jewish Plot" surrounding the issue. These protests were followed by increased attacks on Jewish cemeteries, private property, and the Athens synagogue.²¹ The Archbishop's anti-Semitic remarks continued into 2001, when he declared in an interview printed in *To Vima*, "Do you know who is behind the matter of the identity cards? The Jews, and for the first time we have the evidence."²²

The Archbishop was correct in that Jewish groups had lobbied for years for such changes, but he failed to acknowledge that various Catholic and secular organizations had also advocated for similar reform. The KIS issued a letter critical of the Archbishop's comments and reminded him that his remarks "help create an indiscriminate climate of anti-Semitism, the result [of which] is the eventual vandalism of Jewish cemeteries and institution, which You yourself have been obliged to condemn."²³

In a less overt case of anti-Semitic dissemination, Archimandrite Nektarios Moulatsiotis and the "Rocking Monks" of the Monastery of St. Augustine garnered international recognition after releasing their third album in 2002, the first to include English language tracks. Since the band's conception in 2000, the Rocking Monks, blending modern pop music with religious messages, have entertained a growing fan base amongst the Greek population and achieved platinum sales of their latest release. Archimandrite Moulatsiotis, manager of the Rocking Monks, also leads services and summer youth camps at the monastery, funded in large part by record and book sales.

While the Rocking Monks' records remain free of any questionable references, Father Moulatsiotis' book, *When will the Second Coming of our Lord Occur?* is rife with anti-Semitic passages and Jewish conspiracy theories. Passages such as "Since Hitler didn't achieve what the Jews wanted so they could rule the East and the West, they came up with the idea of creating a new empire, the EU" (Page 225) and "it is rumored that the bearer of number 666 may make his appearance from the EU building. He will be of Jewish origin, he will rule as president of the EU and will switch over to Israel" (Page 318)²⁴ highlight the extent of his views. This book and others can be found in the monastery's souvenir shop, displayed next to copies of the most well known anti-Semitic text, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.²⁵

Signs of Progress

Greece's Jewish community enjoyed two important developments in May 2003, offering encouraging signs in both relations with the Orthodox Church and the Greek state. Following a successful conference on Jewish-Orthodox dialogue, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I visited the Holocaust memorial in Thessaloniki, as well as a nearby synagogue and Jewish museum. David

²¹ Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) Report 2000, section 5.5, available at www.greekhelsinki.gr; World Jewish Congress Report, September/October 2000, Pages 29-30; GREECE: Debate On Anti-Semitism in Greece, AIM, 17 March 2001 available at <http://www.aimpress.org/dyn/trae/archive/data/200103/10317-005-trae-ath.htm>.

²² Report and commentary: "How he responds to the Israelite Council [KIS]: Christodoulos persists with Anti-Semitic Statements", *Avghi*, 3 April 2001, Page 5.

²³ The identity card issue sparked more than a week of vandalism of Jewish monuments and private property in May 2000. On 29 May 2000, 100 graves in Greece's largest Jewish cemetery in Nikaia (Greater Athens) were desecrated with swastikas and neo-Nazi slogans, an act condemned by the government and Archbishop Christodoulos (GHM report 2000, pp. 27-28).

²⁴ Father Nektarios Moulatsiotis: *When will the Second Coming of our Lord Occur?*, Christian Missionary Press, Trikoforos Fokida, 2000.

²⁵ Ios [Virus] Group: "A Miraculous Disneyland," "The 'beliefs' of Father Nektarios." *Eleftherotypia*. 25 February 2001, Pages 45-47. Also available at www.iospress.gr.

Saltiel, head of Thessaloniki's Jewish community, described the May 29th visit as "historic,"²⁶ and the gesture is seen as a sign of warming relations between the two religious communities. On the same day, an important step was taken in addressing Holocaust denial and desensitization. *Agence France Presse* reported that Greek Culture Minister Evangelos Vnizelos confirmed that the government plans to introduce a bill to create a national Holocaust Memorial Day in remembrance of over 50,000 nationals who were killed.²⁷

Recent developments between the Greek Orthodox and Jewish communities are encouraging. However, they are merely steps in the right direction. The Patriarch's recent actions were criticized in many circles and Minister Vnizelos' positive comments have yet to be legally adopted. The current situation requires further efforts be made to eliminate anti-Semitic criticism by journalists, religious leaders, politicians, and other public figures. Left unchecked, anti-Semitism in Greece threatens to mimic growing trends in other European countries. Strong government criticism of unwarranted attacks is necessary to demonstrate that anti-Semitism, operating under any auspice, will not be tolerated. As Greece approaches the international spotlight of the 2004 Summer Olympic games, it is in the country's interest to effectively combat anti-Semitism and enhance respect, freedom, and security for Greece's Jewish community.

²⁶ "Orthodox leader visits Holocaust memorial in former hub of Greek Jewish culture," Associated Press Newswires, 29 May 2003.

²⁷ "Greece to introduce national Holocaust Memorial Day," *Agence France Presse*, 29 May 2003.